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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 000879

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF ISSUES RAISED IN SECSTATE MEETINGS WITH
FRENCH GOVERNMENT

REF: KIEV 576

Classified By: DCM Alex Wolff for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) In a February 10 meeting with MFA Cabinet Director Vimont (protect), DCM discussed follow up to issues raised during Secretary's meetings in Paris February 8. Vimont said the French side had been pleased by the visit and the level of discussion with the Secretary. Review of specific issues follows:

China Arms Embargo

2. (C) Vimont characterized the exchange between the Secretary and FM Barnier as not revealing anything new by

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either side. Vimont said the French side understood better the vehemence of Congressional feeling on the matter. DCM reiterated USG concerns, which he said were also strongly felt. He noted that while the EU side seemed to be listening to our concerns, there was no indication they were doing much to address them. Indeed, the decision to lift seemed to be on autopilot, with only the timing in question. This was no way for an ally to deal with an issue of strategic and political concern to another. Vimont acknowledged that European sensitivities to the strategic dangers were mitigated by the geographic distance between China and Europe. He argued that the French had resisted pressure by the Chinese to obtain dangerous technologies, and would continue to do so. He thought there was still an opportunity to discuss ways to assuage U.S. concerns, although he offered no details.

ICC/Darfur

3. (C) Vimont said the French side understands the U.S. view on the ICC, but noted that France had its own domestic constituency to worry about in how it handles ICC issues. He thought a way around our differences could be found if each side respected the position of the other. DCM described U.S. approach as fully respectful of ICC member governments. He noted that our effort to obtain Article 98 agreements with European governments reflected that respect since these agreements were consistent with the Rome Statute -- and had been suggested by the French earlier as a means for dealing with our concerns. It was European resistance to such agreements that suggested lack of respect for the U.S. position. Asked if France was prepared to discuss an Article 98 agreement with the U.S., Vimont reiterated that the French were not opposed in principle, but offered no sign that the French position had changed. He suggested that we take up the matter with the incoming MFA legal advisor.

4. (C) Asked if France had any thoughts on how to address our differences over the Darfur/ICC issue, Vimont speculated one possibility could be to incorporate into any resolution a statement exempting U.S. nationals from ICC jurisdiction in this one case. DCM noted that if France was prepared to do so on an ad hoc basis for Darfur, we did not understand why a blanket arrangement through Article 98 agreements with France and others that resolve the broader issue was proving so difficult.

Iraq

5. (C) DCM noted signs of internal French debate on the merits of announcing a deadline for U.S. troop withdrawal as a necessary element to help stabilize Iraq. Vimont said the French position still favored such an announcement, although it need not be a fixed or firm commitment. He reiterated familiar arguments about the need for a clearer sense of a departure timetable to promote greater participation by as many Iraqi elements, particularly Sunni, in the political process. DCM reviewed arguments against announcing a timeline for withdrawal, emphasizing the boost this would give to terrorist and rejectionist groups. Vimont accepted the point, but said the French view was that some sort of signal in this direction would be helpful. DCM said U.S. statements indicating an intention to depart as soon as the conditions allowed were already pretty clear. In this regard, DCM raised report that suggested FM Barnier was

pleased by the decision by Kiev to withdraw Ukrainian troops from Iraq (reftel) and asked if there was an explanation for such an impression being left. Vimont expressed surprise at the characterization of Barnier's reaction. He said the French position was that a staged orderly withdrawal of foreign forces was a good thing for all concerned, but this did not mean an uncoordinated, precipitate departure that endangered efforts to stabilize the country. Vimont argued that, contrary to the allegations expressed by some in the U.S., France believes a U.S. defeat in Iraq would be a disaster for everyone. He concluded that despite our difference over the war, U.S. and French expressed objectives for Iraq now generally coincide.

Iran/IAEA -----

¶6. (C) DCM described tenor of the Secretary's discussion on Iran with French opinion leaders. Asked if President Chirac's assessment of Iranian nuclear objectives and skepticism of success by the EU-3 were shared by the Foreign Ministry, Vimont acknowledged that Chirac's anti-Shia bias was deep-rooted. Vimont also confirmed that the French were prepared to support referral of the Iranian case to the Security Council -- albeit in conformity with a formal process which would follow a report by the IAEA denoting non-compliance.

¶7. (C) Vimont asked about U.S. views on El Baradei's succession. He said the French did not want any conflict with the U.S. over the issue, but there was still no credible alternative candidate, and if taken to a vote, El Baradei would be re-elected by a large margin. DCM suggested that Political Director Laboulaye discuss the issue with U/S Bolton next week in London.

Syria/Lebanon/Hizbollah -----

¶8. (C) Recalling President Chirac's suggestion that we begin speaking about UN sanctions against Syria if Damascus did not comply with UNSCR 1599, DCM asked if the Foreign Ministry shared that approach. Vimont confirmed that President Chirac was determined to put as much pressure on Syria as necessary to ensure its compliance, but admitted candidly that the MFA's traditional approach was to consider the effect of such a step on Syria's capacity to be an irritant in other areas. He concluded, however, that President Chirac's views would, again, determine the French approach, even if the MFA was not as enthusiastic.

¶9. (C) DCM raised the unhelpful role of Hizbollah as another concern, asking whether French attitudes toward Hizbollah's role in terrorism had evolved, particularly in light of Palestinian President Abu Mazen's reference to support by Hizbollah for Palestinian terrorists. Vimont confirmed that Abu Mazen had mentioned this to FM Barnier as well. He said that President Chirac viewed Hizbollah primarily in connection with Lebanon, and until he was convinced that Hizbollah's activities threatened directly French interests in Lebanon, he doubted that Paris would be swayed even by Abu Mazen's statement.

Afghanistan/PRT's -----

¶10. (C) Noting growing interest on the part of the French defense establishment to consider French participation in a PRT or in a forward support base for PRT's, DCM asked if the French were ready to take such a decision well in advance of the Afghan elections this summer. Vimont acknowledged signs of evolution in French thinking on PRT's but said a decision to participate would require an interagency decision to raise the matter again with President Chirac, but did not indicate any such decision was imminent.

Guantanamo Detainees -----

¶11. (C) Vimont said the French response to our diplomatic note proposing the return of the three remaining French detainees in Guantanamo would include "quite similar" undertakings to those for the previously returned detainees. He said the response was still being cleared interagency and he anticipated no problems.

¶12. (U) Bagdad minimize considered.

Leach